

## *Veganism's moral high ground needs some flavour to save planet*

The Toronto Star

September 13, 2017 Wednesday

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**Section:** NEWS; Pg. A4

**Length:** 865 words

**Byline:** Emma Teitel

### **Body**

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For anyone who believes climate change is a genuinely terrifying threat to human beings, hurricanes Harvey and Irma haven't just uprooted houses and irrevocably altered landscapes - they've altered our psychology.

This is because post-Harvey and Irma, climate change is no longer a scary idea to be reckoned with at a much later date. It's here, right now, playing out in real time, if not outside our doors then in our newsfeeds and on our TVs. It's understandable, then, that the impulse to do something - anything - to stall environmental turmoil may appear much stronger today than it did a few months ago.

But impulse comes easier than action, especially when that action involves bidding farewell to baby back ribs and incorporating something called cashew cheese into your diet. Yes, I am talking about veganism, the great green hope of planet Earth - the plant-based lifestyle that could, if everyone in the world adopted it, cut annual greenhouse gas emissions in half, but that, sadly, tends to involve a lot of flax seeds.

Calls to go vegan in the fight against climate change have rung out far and wide recently, from academia to climate activism to the restaurant industry. Earlier this year, George C. Wang, an assistant professor of medicine at Columbia University Medical Center, argued in a column for CNN that "adopting a plant-based diet is one of the most powerful choices an individual can make in mitigating environmental degradation and depletion of Earth's natural resources."

Last week, the Guardian editorial board declared that "vegans are often unfairly mocked" and "should instead be praised" because of their lifestyle's potential to reduce emissions. And this week, a group of vegetarians took to the streets outside a downtown Toronto pub to protest meat eaters, a type of protest that will one day appear completely ordinary, argues celebrity plant-based chef Matthew Kenney.

Kenney told the Times in the U.K. last week that eating meat will one day "become the new cigarette - where it's just not cool to consume it, at least not factory-produced meat. It may sound hard to imagine, but 20 years ago it would have been hard to imagine no smoking in restaurants. It may not become illegal to eat the way we eat now, but it will certainly be pass#233;."

This is like arguing that pleasure will one day become pass#233;. Vegans may have the moral high ground when it comes to treating Earth with respect, and plant-based diets may be the key to slowing climate change, but moral high ground is, I suspect, ultimately meaningless if you're asking people to give up what is arguably the greatest pleasure in their lives: the food they love.

Research shows that if they have to choose between the two, many people choose food over sex and the vast majority of people on this planet are not vegan. According to survey data published last year by online personal chef marketplace MiumMium, nearly one third of respondents said they'd choose the best meal of their lives over

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sex. According to another survey conducted in 2013 at Columbia University, 42 per cent of respondents (all of them college students at the school) said they'd give up oral sex before they'd give up cheese.

I know how they feel. If I've accomplished an important task or met a difficult goal, my reward is always a hunk of unpasteurized cheese. I would sooner lose a limb than abandon this reward system because, besides my family and friends, eating cheese is honestly what brings me the most joy in life.

Granted, I would probably give up cheese in order to avoid a climate-change-induced natural disaster, but the reality remains: requesting that people cut back on the food they love is no small thing. It's asking that they radically reduce the amount of pleasure they experience in their daily lives; it's asking too that they radically alter family traditions. No turkey at Thanksgiving, no brisket at Rosh Hashanah. (Absent these mouth-watering roasts, some family dinners may get violent.)

If vegan activists are serious about getting people to give up animal-based products, they should drop the moral high ground argument and instead transfer all their energy to advocating for the production of legitimately delicious and affordable artificial meat, #224; la the critically acclaimed plant-based hamburger released by Impossible Foods last year that sold for \$12 at New York restaurant Momofuku Nishi. The plant-based burger (that bleeds!) has since attracted major investors, among them Bill Gates and Hong Kong business magnate Li Ka-shing. And what do you know: it's actually supposed to taste really good, and really meaty.

The vegan argument will succeed, I predict, if it shifts from "you're doing what's best for planet Earth" platitudes to "you're doing what's best for planet Earth at no real loss to your taste buds."

Until then, people will turn to their animal-based comfort foods in times of turmoil, even if such food actively contributes to that turmoil. Because for many of us, a life without cheese, or a substitute that actually tastes like cheese, simply isn't worth living.

And I'm sorry, but the cashew spread just doesn't cut it.

Emma Teitel is a national affairs columnist.

## Classification

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**Language:** ENGLISH

**Document-Type:** COLUMN

**Publication-Type:** NEWSPAPER

**Subject:** CLIMATE CHANGE (90%); MEAT FREE DIETS (90%); CLIMATE ACTION (89%); CLIMATOLOGY (89%); ENVIRONMENT & NATURAL RESOURCES (89%); LIFE FORMS (89%); SOCIETY, SOCIAL ASSISTANCE & LIFESTYLE (89%); CELEBRITIES (78%); EMISSIONS (78%); NEGATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS (78%); PLANETS & ASTEROIDS (78%); WEATHER (78%); NATURAL RESOURCES (77%); PSYCHOLOGY (77%); POLLUTION MONITORING, PREVENTION & REMEDIATION (75%); GREENHOUSE GASES (73%); MANUFACTURING FACILITIES (73%); COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS (66%); SMOKING (60%)

**Organization:** COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY (54%)

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**Industry:** RESTAURANTS (87%); CELEBRITIES (78%); EMISSIONS (78%); PSYCHOLOGY (77%); MANUFACTURING FACILITIES (73%); RESTAURANTS & FOOD SERVICE (71%); ACADEMIC MEDICAL CENTERS (70%); COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS (66%); RESTAURANTS & FOOD SERVICE INDUSTRY (66%); TOBACCO PRODUCTS (60%)

**Geographic:** EARTH (92%); ONTARIO, CANADA (58%); UNITED KINGDOM (52%)

**Load-Date:** September 13, 2017

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